

AN ILLITERATE'S DECLARATION TO THE LITERACY PREACHER

(FIRST PUBLISHED 1996)

by: DAYAL CHAND SONI

CHAPTER 1: THE DAY DAWNS EVEN IN THOSE PLACES WHERE THE ROOSTER DOES NOT CROW

- 1.** Listen to me O' Preacher, Campaigner of Literacy and School Education! Listen to me O' Liberator, Benefactor of the downtrodden, poor illiterates and the uneducated.
- 2.** Since you have come to my village and my home as a guest, I welcome you and I very much appreciate your visiting me.
- 3.** I am grateful to you for the slogans you have shouted, the songs you have sung and the drums you have sounded to awaken me.
- 4.** I am also grateful to you for your having undertaken this journey on-foot, for your foregoing the comforts of the city to see me.
- 5.** I am again grateful to you for being so worried about me. I have given my full attention to all of your preaching's.
- 6.** If I understand your basic mission, you believe that we are 'illiterate' and 'uneducated' -- a 'black spot' on the nation. And because of this, you are deeply ashamed of us.
- 7.** Up until today, you alone have spoken and I have been a silent and respectful listener of your sermons. But today, it is your turn to pay attention and listen to what I have to say.
- 8.** Please take note: I too write the alphabet but not on a slate or on a piece of paper as you do. I write my alphabet on the surface of the fertile soil of my fields -- my spade is my pen. The fruits of my alphabet quell your hunger. You gobble them up happily and without complaint.

9. On the other hand, you hold a pen in place of a spade and dig your alphabet on paper. What is produced by this paper farming of yours is a mystery to me. Do you even know what grows there?

10. You always maintain a clear and deliberate distance from the milk-yielding cows, she-buffaloes and she goats, but at the same time you find it difficult to resist consuming dairy products such as milk, butter and curd.

11. There is a marked difference between our life styles. While I am engaged in productive activities all day and night, you are engaged only in consuming what I produce. Yet I lead a more peaceful and content life, while you constantly complain and create trouble in society with your insatiable discontent.

12. My activities and my interactions provide me with rich learning opportunities on a daily basis. On the other hand, you are unable to tread the path of education without direction and coercion from your classroom teachers.

13. Whereas your education is restricted only to your books, my whole existence is a rich garden of learning.

14. Your school is by no means a source of real learning. Your school is nothing but a trader in the commodity of education. The real source, or the mine for learning, is the WORK in which one is engaged and whose company I constantly live in.

15. Since you are not aware of my educational achievements, let me tell you that I am a specialist in agriculture, I am an expert in dairy work and I am a scholar in my local dialect.

16. My learning is apparent and authentic in itself. I do not worry about being awarded any certificates to prove this.

17. Mother learning is not a captive in the prison of the schools. Nor is the basic knowledge of life contained in and restricted to the jumble of the alphabet and numerical figures.

18. Like the all-pervasive God, learning is present in every atom of this universe. Learning is an unstoppable or ceaseless activity of devotion.

19. Learning, in its infinite forms, is a universal phenomenon. The stereotyped, monotonous and uniform pattern of education in your school is not suitable for supporting the multiple faces of learning.

20. Dawn and daybreak take place even where there is no cock to crow and announce the morning. In the same manner, learning too takes place and goes on freely even where you do not start and run a school.

21. Yet I would not be so arrogant as to deny my need to further my education. But how can I agree to your claim of deserving to be my teacher? In my mind, you are not properly equipped to take on this role.

CHAPTER 2: If the Schooled People were really Educated, We would not need such a large Police Force!

22. Dear Literacy Missionary, My Brother! I am sorry to say that you do not know the real definition of education. That is precisely the reason why you consider yourself to be educated.

23. Real education is not about changing one's attire or their spoken language. True education is that which clarifies and elevates one's moral conduct and one's character.

24. The educated person would not consume without himself taking part in producing. The educated person would not only selfishly seek to acquire things; he would also give or contribute something. The educated person would reduce his needs and necessities to their bare minimum.

25. The educated person would first serve to others before feeding himself. And he would not desert his tired and exhausted companions. He would seek to care for them.

26. The educated person would not pose to be a valiant hero in the presence of a weak person, nor would he be submissive to a person stronger than himself.

27. Learning consists of doing one's duty with devotion. Learning is to strive to attain Truth, Auspiciousness and Beauty (*Satyam, Shivam, Sundaram*) in life.

28. Learning is not limited to the acquisition of knowledge or skills, nor does it lie in a collection of certificates or the passage of exams.

29. Real learning cannot be evaluated within the short period of three hours, which are allotted for answering the questions asked in an examination. The real test of learning extends up to the time when a person breathes his last breath.

30. An educated person does not require a watchman to stop him from doing anything immoral. He is his own watchman to guard himself from wrong-doing. He sticks to truth as his protector of morality and does not waver from it.

31. A person who is trustworthy and illiterate is far more educated than one who is not trustworthy but literate.

CHAPTER 3: The School Destroys our Innate Cooperative Spirit

32. The course of school education is opposed to the innate nature of children. They come with a longing for play and outdoor activity. That is why children are not enthusiastic about the school.

33. But having realized that the children are not naturally interested in the school course, the school management mercilessly uses the whip of competition and rivalry to motivate friends in the same class. Thus, in the absence of genuine interest, the school creates an artificial interest around the curriculum, interest which is based more on anxiety or fear than on the passion to learn.

34. That is why whether or not he learns anything in school, a schooled student is destined to get caught up in a vicious cycle of rivalry and competition.

35. In this manner, each student is made a secret enemy of his other classmates. Thus, mutual love, trust and the spirit of cooperation are killed and buried in the grave of competition.

36. A sense of equality and the virtue of contentment get burned in the oven of the school.

37. The schooled person of course knows how to get served by others but does not know how to serve others. He is endowed only with a cynical logic and rationality, with which he tries to degrade and minimize the contribution of others.

38. The school motivates its graduates to run over others, to abandon all sensitivity and compassion for others.

39. Let me eat while the others cook, let me speak while the others listen. Let me measure, weigh and judge others but let not anyone else measure, weigh and judge me. Such is the attitude of the schooled person.

40. Only I matter and I am important. Others are neither important nor do they matter. Let the crops of the others be destroyed without irrigation but let my garden be green and flourish. This is how the schooled person behaves.

41. The real problem of today's society is not that the working class is illiterate. In fact the real problem is that the schooled people of our society are averse to work, particularly to any sort of physical labor.

42. O my Literacy Teacher, had you been successful in removing the anti-manual labor mentality of the schooled folk, you could also have succeeded in removing the illiteracy of the laboring class.

43. The school not only inculcates a hatred for physical labor among its participants, it also inculcates in them an attitude of not working seriously, even in their academic or official commitments.

44. The schooled person feels that all of the serious work that he should do in his life, he has already completed by preparing for and passing his school or college examinations. Therefore, he has no incentive or will to use his mind outside of what is prescribed by the education authorities.